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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT — Thursday, October 26, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MORE FREEZER-LOCKERS IN THE EAST." Information from K. F. Warner, Extension Meat Specialist, Bureau of Animal Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Our Washington reporter has been gathering information this week on what she calls "safe-deposit boxes for foods." Perhaps some of you have wondered about freezer-lockers, - whether they are practical, how much they cost, what disadvantages there are, if any, and how to get a plant established in your neighborhood. Our correspondent supplies most of the answers. She writes:

"I've been talking to Kenneth F. Warner, extension meat specialist of the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Mr. Warner has been watching the rather phenomenal spread of the freezer-locker idea from the Pacific Northwest toward the Central and Eastern States. He has also directed several research studies in the Department on the effect of frozen storage of different meats for varying periods.

"Some ten years ago, says Mr. Warner, a few scattered storage plants in 3 or 4 Western States began adding freezer-locker units to rent to private customers. Farmers brought their home-dressed meats, their poultry products, fruits and vegetables to these units. Temperatures were below freezing, though few were kept at the near-zero levels maintained in most plants today.

"At present there are over 1,800 such locker plants in 38 States. The expansion is continuing, especially in the East and lately in the South. Frozen storage is becoming a valuable supplement to the other kinds of food preservation used by farm families. Many of the newer locker plants offer rather complete food-handling services to their customers. They will chill, cut up, wrap, and sharp-freeze meats, and in some plants cure them. Some will also precool market eggs and

berries, store game for hunters, even fox food for fur farms. In fact, some of them are equipped to store fur coats in summer, as well as butter, ice cream, nuts, fruits, and vegetables the year round.

"The rent of a locker ranges from about 5 to 12 dollars a year. The cutting wrapping and freezing charges are based on the number of pounds handled. Folks that live in villages and farm families which have no livestock of their own often buy farm dressed or commercial, inspected sides or quarters from the locker plant and then store them. They also buy and store quantities of chickens, eggs, and garden products at the seasons when those foods are relatively cheap.

"However, while farm families welcome the establishment of locker plants as one way of providing a better food supply, Mr. Warner points out that these lockers are an additional method of storing surplus foods, not a substitute for canning, curing, or pit or cellar storage. Incidentally, a good household refrigerator has its place, not only for storing perishables from day to day, but as the first stop for the frozen products on their way from the locker to the dinner table.

"On the cost side, home-grown foods that are canned or cured at home are generally cheaper than the frozen products. That is, provided the family has the equipment, such as a steam pressure canner and plenty of containers, if fuel is cheap, and there's no loss from spoilage.

"At this time of year farm families are chiefly interested in storing the meat from their own animals. By spacing the time of killing throughout the year, the family can easily have a continuous 12-months' supply of fresh frozen retail cuts of meats from a locker. While it's possible to store properly packaged and frozen meats from 6 months to a year, the quality is better if smaller quantities are stored and used, and replaced every few months. A three-months' storage period is best for pork under the conditions existing in many locker plants.

"About the advantages and disadvantages of freezer lockers: On the plus

side Mr. Warner puts flavor, which more nearly resembles that of fresh foods than does the flavor of canned or cured foods. Some frozen foods are reported to have a higher vitamin content than similar home-canned foods, if prepared and frozen when they are in prime condition.

"Now as to disadvantages: Considerable planning ahead is necessary to get the best use from a locker unit. This includes planning for a succession of garden crops in the growing season, and for farm meat animals to be dressed at frequent intervals. The cash cost for locker rent and services must be taken into account. Compare the locker cost with the cost of canning or curing, and possible waste by spoilage.

"Going to a locker plant several miles away may be inconvenient, but Mr. Warner reports that few farmers complain of this. The locker plant may be at or near the creamery where the farmer is going anyway. It does not take long to unlock a food safe-deposit box and bring home a roast for dinner. One objection sometimes raised is that all the tender meat cuts are eaten first, leaving the stew and shank meats until last. That is another opportunity for careful planning. The fresh frozen steaks and roasts should be used to lend variety to a diet of canned and cured meat.

"It's true that when stored under improper conditions or for too long a period, food in a freezer unit may dry out and lose flavor. If your community plans to have a freezer-locker plant in the neighborhood, have a committee get in touch with the owner of an established and successful plant, and learn the important points about selecting a location and running the business. And you can get additional points from a mimeographed circular written by Mr. Warner and distributed by the Bureau of Animal Industry."

And with that tip our Washington reporter leaves us to further explore these freezer lockers for ourselves.

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